

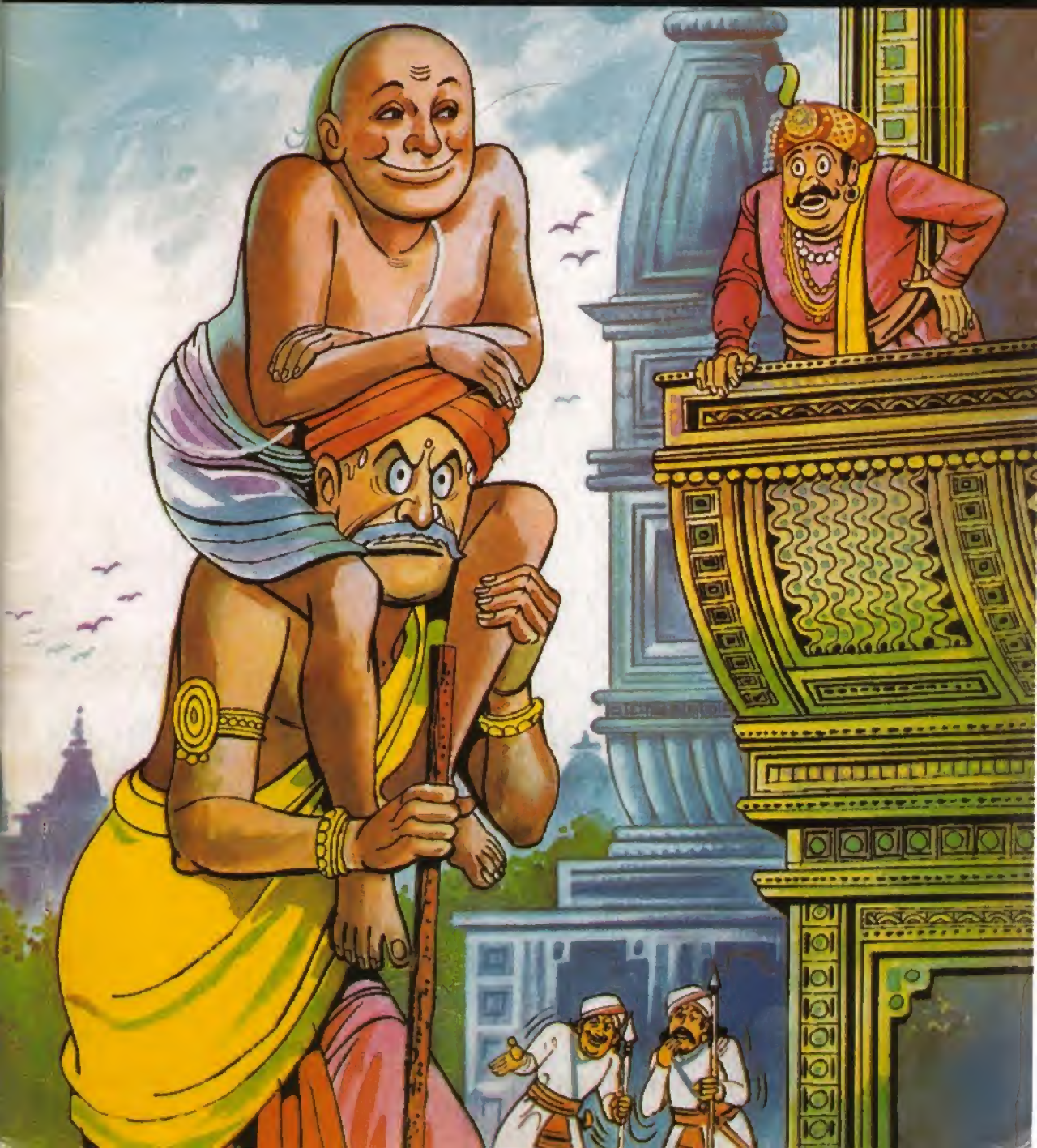


RAMAN OF TENALI

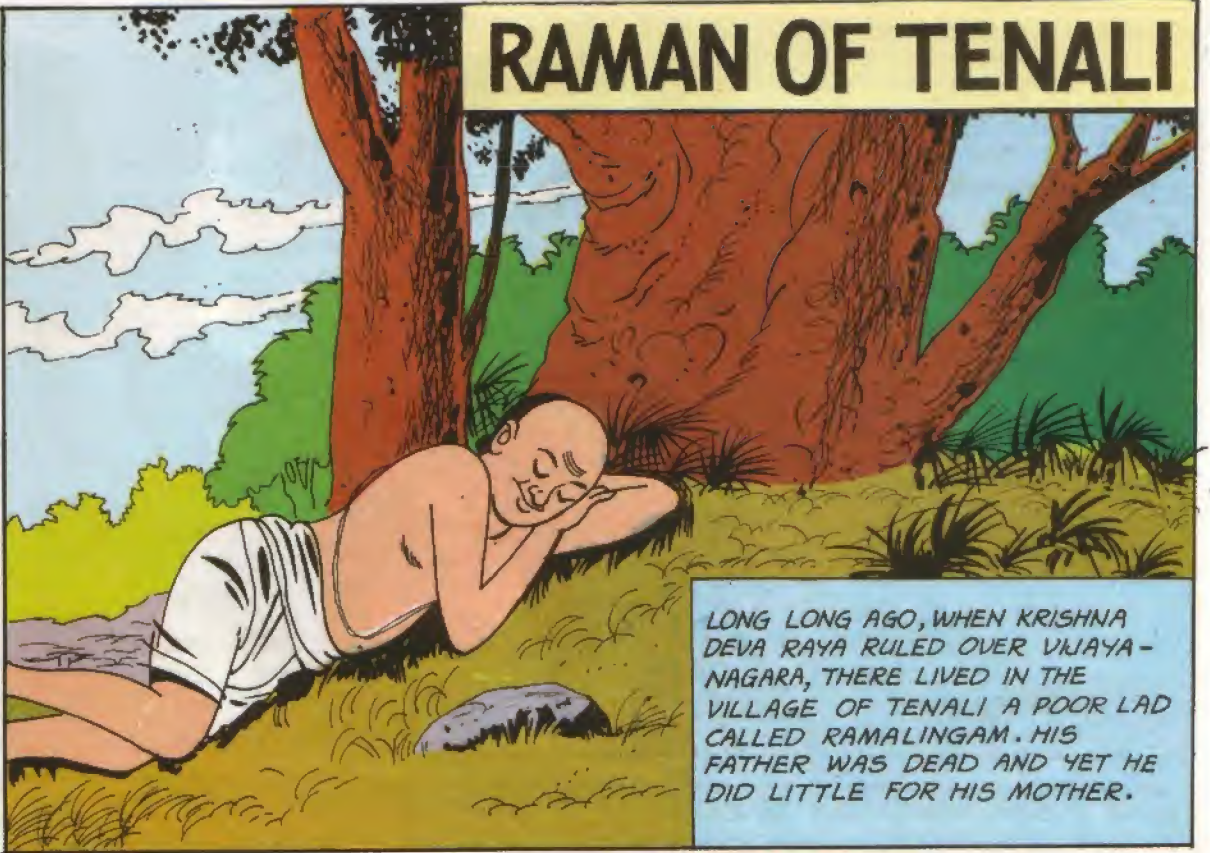
THE BIRBAL OF THE SOUTH

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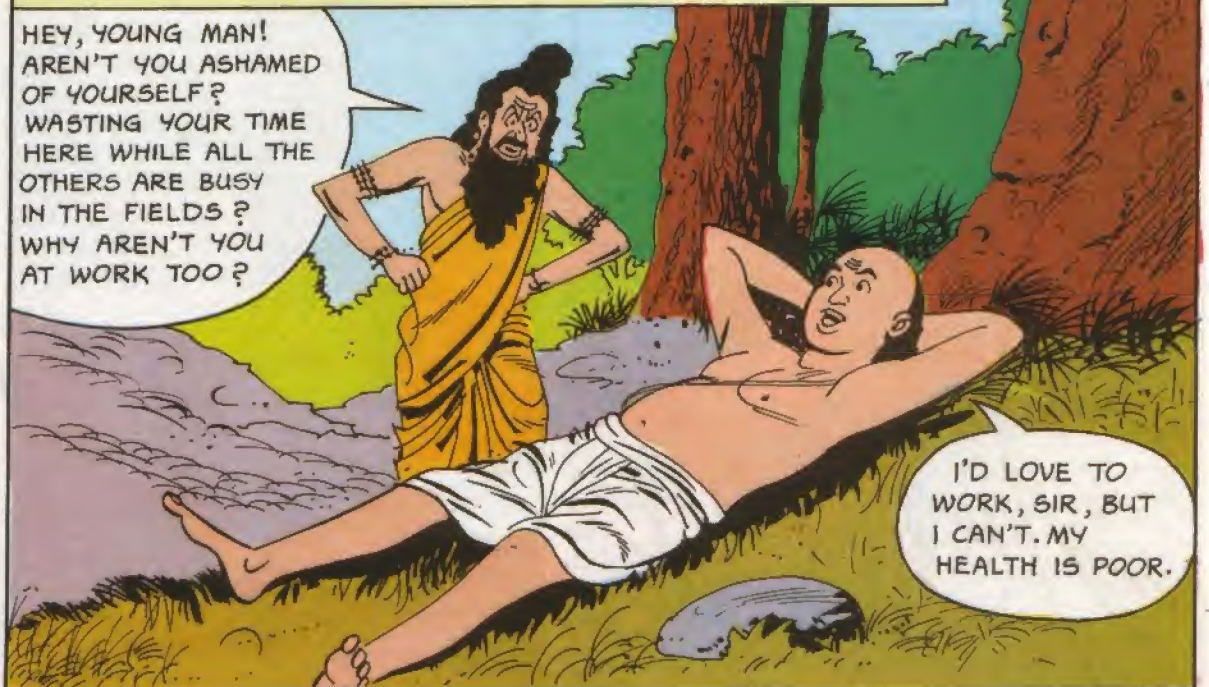
RAMAN OF TENALI



LONG LONG AGO, WHEN KRISHNA DEVA RAYA RULED OVER VIJAYA-NAGARA, THERE LIVED IN THE VILLAGE OF TENALI A POOR LAD CALLED RAMALINGAM. HIS FATHER WAS DEAD AND YET HE DID LITTLE FOR HIS MOTHER.

ONE DAY, HE WAS IDLING AS USUAL UNDER A TREE WHEN —

HEY, YOUNG MAN!
AREN'T YOU ASHAMED
OF YOURSELF?
WASTING YOUR TIME
HERE WHILE ALL THE
OTHERS ARE BUSY
IN THE FIELDS?
WHY AREN'T YOU
AT WORK TOO?



I'D LOVE TO
WORK, SIR, BUT
I CAN'T. MY
HEALTH IS POOR.

IT WAS A LIE BUT THE SADHU BELIEVED HIM. HE FELT SORRY FOR THE YOUTH.

IF THAT IS SO, I'LL
TEACH YOU A MANTRA*
TO INVOKE THE
GODDESS MAHAKALI.
WHEN SHE APPEARS,
ASK HER TO BLESS
YOU WITH GOOD
HEALTH.

I'LL LEARN
THE MANTRA ALL
RIGHT — BUT IT'S
PLENTY OF FOOD
I'LL ASK FOR. THAT
IS THE BLESSING
I NEED.

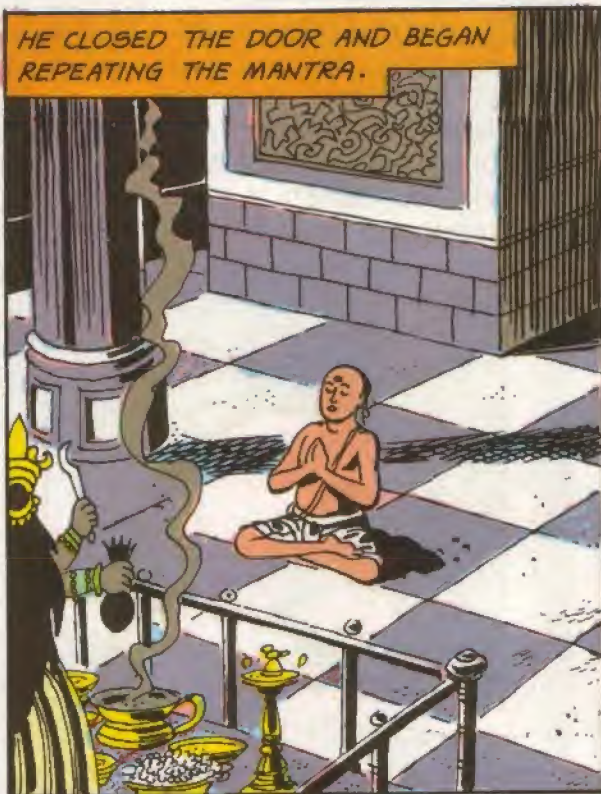
BEING CLEVER, RAMALINGAM OR RAMAN AS
HE WAS KNOWN, SOON LEARNT THE MANTRA.

GOOD! NOW GO TO THE
TEMPLE TONIGHT. SIT BEFORE
THE IDOL AND REPEAT THE
MANTRA A HUNDRED THOUSAND
TIMES. THE GODDESS WILL
THEN APPEAR.

AS YOU
SAY, SIR.

THAT NIGHT, MUTTERING THE
MANTRA TO HIMSELF, RAMAN
RAN TO THE TEMPLE.

HE CLOSED THE DOOR AND BEGAN REPEATING THE MANTRA.



AFTER HE HAD DONE SO FOR THE HUNDRED THOUSANDTH TIME —



IT WAS THE GODDESS! THE MOMENT RAMAN SAW HER, A FUNNY THOUGHT OCCURRED TO HIM AND HE BEGAN TO LAUGH.



THE GODDESS WAS FURIOUS AT THIS IRREVERENCE.

IMPERTINENT BOY!
HOW DARE YOU!
STOP THAT LAUGHTER
AT ONCE!



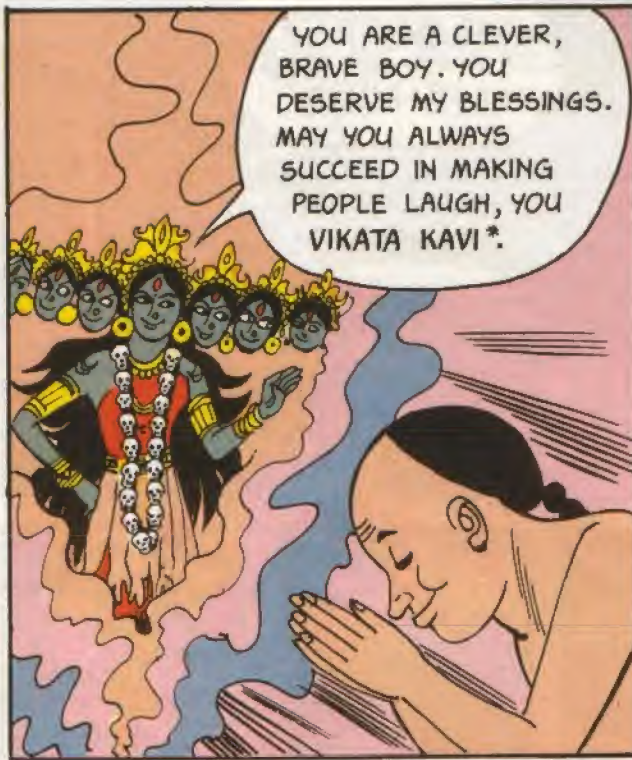
HO!HO! FORGIVE ME,
GODDESS! BUT —I COULD
NOT STOP THIS ONE NOSE
WHEN I HAD CAUGHT A
COLD. WHAT WOULD YOU
DO, I WONDERED, IF YOUR
THOUSAND NOSES RAN!

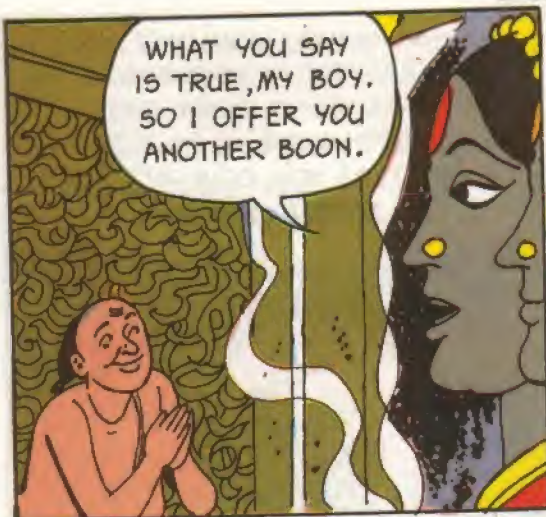


THE GODDESS COULD NOT HELP BEING
AMUSED.

IT CERTAINLY WOULD BE
FUNNY IF MY TWO HANDS WERE
TO BATTLE IN VAIN WITH MY
THOUSAND NOSES!



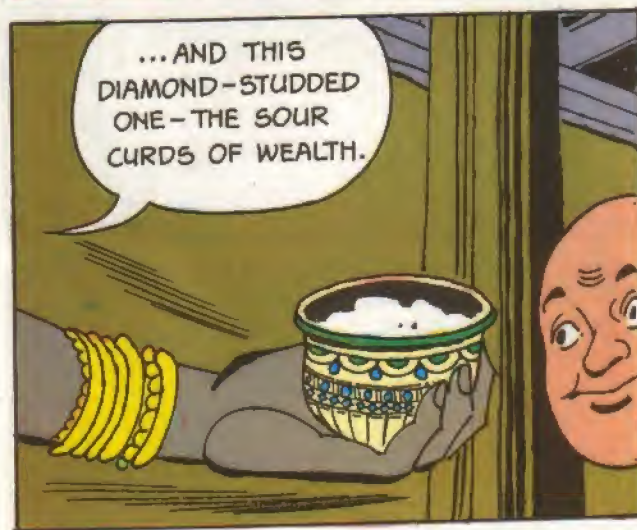




WHAT YOU SAY
IS TRUE, MY BOY.
SO I OFFER YOU
ANOTHER BOON.



THIS GOLDEN CUP
CONTAINS THE SWEET
MILK OF LEARNING...



...AND THIS
DIAMOND-STUDDED
ONE - THE SOUR
CURDS OF WEALTH.



ONE OF THEM
SHALL BE YOURS.
NOW YOU
CHOOSE.

BOTH.



WHY IS THE
GIFT OF WEALTH
OFFERED IN THE
FORM OF CURDS?

BECAUSE WEALTH
IS SELDOM ATTAINED
BY PLEASANT
MEANS.

RAMAN WAS QUIET FOR A MOMENT. THEN —

O GODDESS, HOW CAN I CHOOSE WITHOUT FIRST TASTING BOTH?

THAT'S TRUE.



WITHOUT THINKING, THE GODDESS HELD OUT THE CUPS.

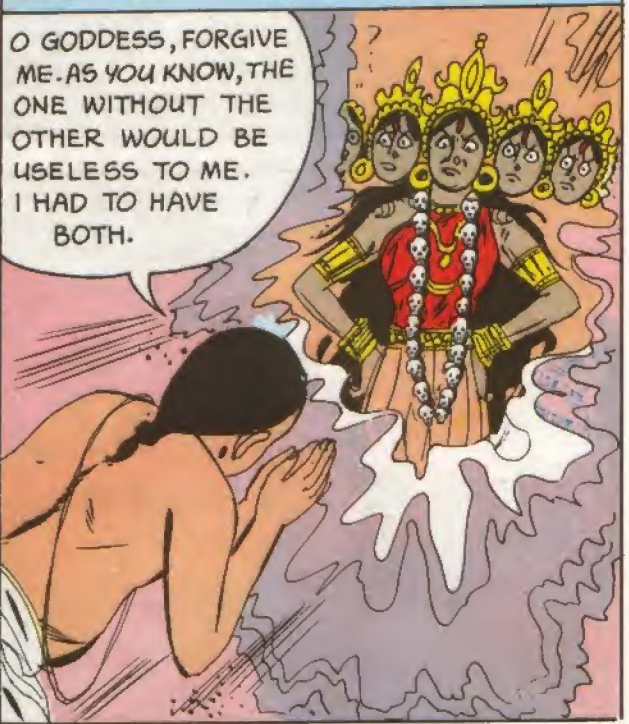


BEFORE SHE KNEW WHAT WAS HAPPENING, RAMAN GULPED DOWN THE CONTENTS OF BOTH CUPS.



TOO LATE, THE GODDESS REALISED SHE HAD BEEN TRICKED. SHE WAS FURIOUS. BUT RAMAN BOWED HUMBLY BEFORE HER.

O GODDESS, FORGIVE ME. AS YOU KNOW, THE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER WOULD BE USELESS TO ME. I HAD TO HAVE BOTH.



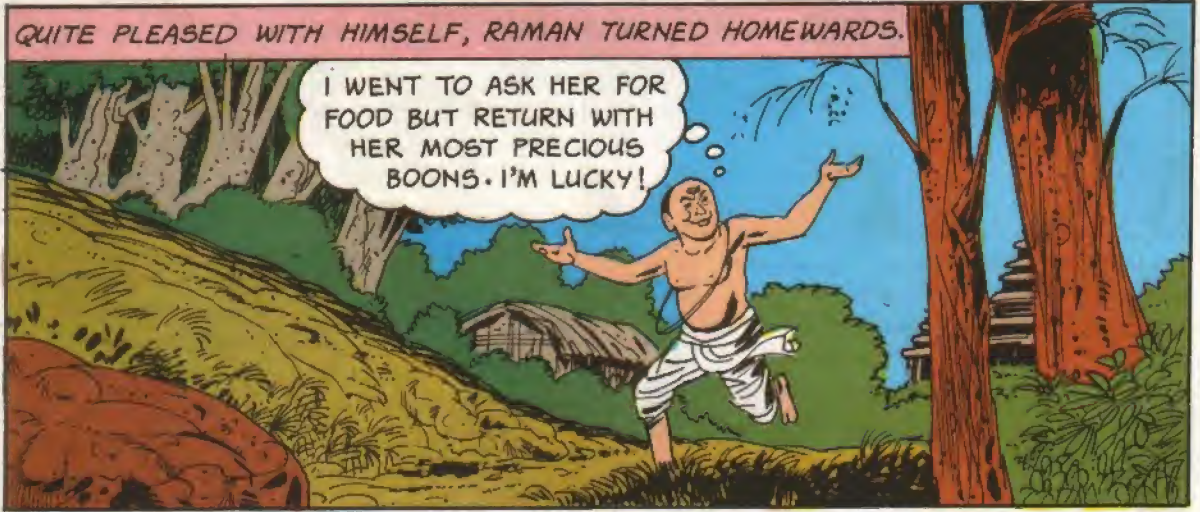
BY THEN THE GODDESS HAD CALMED DOWN AND SHE DID NOT FIND IT DIFFICULT TO FORGIVE HIM. BUT —

NOW THAT YOU HAVE BOTH GIFTS, YOU SHALL BE WITTY AND WEALTHY; BUT YOUR PROSPERITY WILL ALSO BRING YOU JEALOUS ENEMIES.



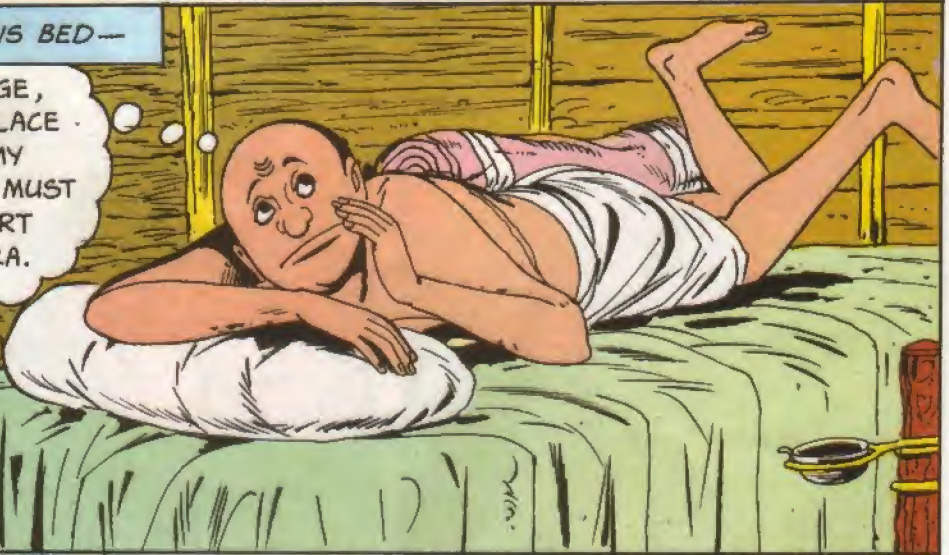
QUITE PLEASED WITH HIMSELF, RAMAN TURNED HOMEWARDS.

I WENT TO ASK HER FOR FOOD BUT RETURN WITH HER MOST PRECIOUS BOONS. I'M LUCKY!



AS HE LAY ON HIS BED —

THIS TINY VILLAGE, TENALI, IS NO PLACE FOR A MAN OF MY ATTAINMENTS. I MUST ENTER THE COURT OF VIJAYANAGARA.

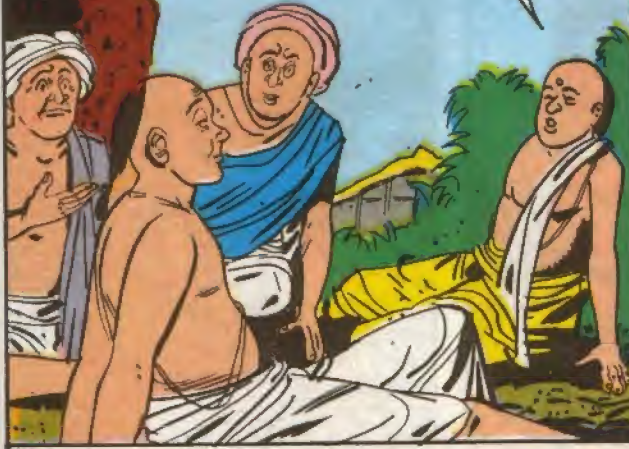


THE NEXT DAY WHEN HE SPOKE OF IT TO HIS FRIENDS —

ARE YOU MAD, RAMAN?

THE PALACE IS NO PLACE FOR RUSTICS.

THOSE HEFTY GUARDS AT THE GATES WILL THROW YOU OUT.



RAMAN KNEW WHAT THEY HAD SAID WAS TRUE BUT HE WAS NOT DETERRED.



I MUST GO TO VIJAYANAGARA. ONCE THERE, I AM SURE TO FIND A WAY OUT. BUT LET ME FIRST FIND A PATRON IN VIJAYANAGARA.

RAMAN SPENT HIS DAYS WONDERING HOW TO GET A PATRON. THEN SUDDENLY, ONE DAY —

WHAT'S ALL THE COMMOTION ABOUT?

DON'T YOU KNOW? THE RAJGURU* HAS COME FROM VIJAYANAGARA TO WORSHIP AT THE SHRINE OF MANGALA-GIRI.



RAMAN WAS OVERJOYED.



I KNEW IT WOULD HAPPEN. I KNEW LUCK WOULD COME MY WAY.

RAMAN FOLLOWED THE RAJ-GURU TO THE SHRINE.

SIR, MAY I HAVE THE PRIVILEGE OF SERVING YOU ?

AND WHO, MAY I ASK, ARE YOU ?



WHEN RAMAN TOLD HIM —

WHY NOT MAKE USE OF THE IGNORANT VILLAGE BUMPKIN ?



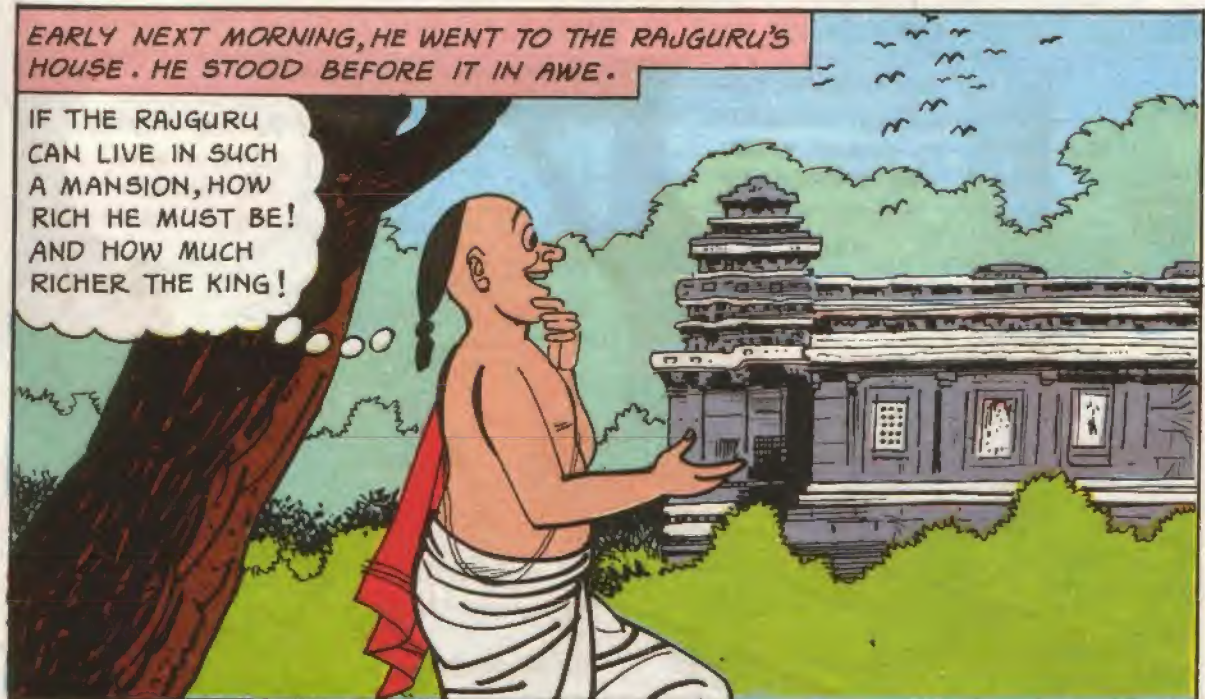
ALL RIGHT, I AM ON MY WAY TO THE RIVER TO BATHE. YOU MAY CARRY MY TOWEL FOR ME.



SIR, I TOO HOPE TO BELONG TO THE COURT OF VIJAYANAGARA, SOME DAY.

WELL, WHY NOT ? BUT WHAT WILL YOU DO THERE ?





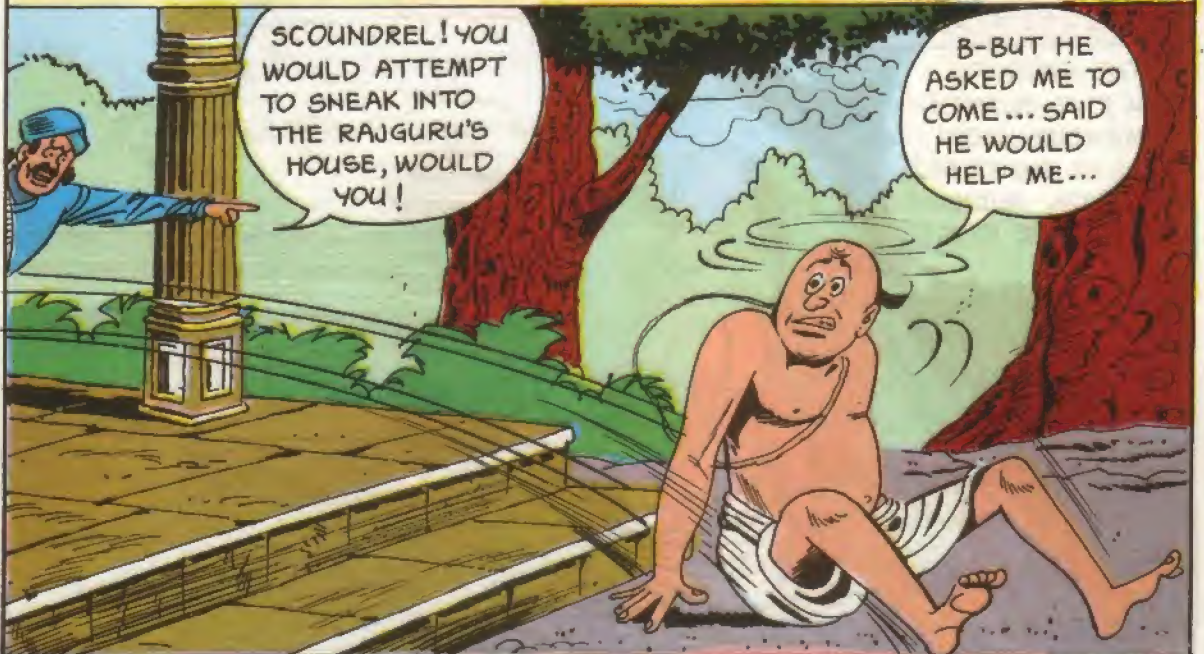
MEANWHILE, THE RAJGURU HAD SEEN RAMAN FROM ONE OF HIS WINDOWS.



HE SENT FOR ONE OF HIS ATTENDANTS.

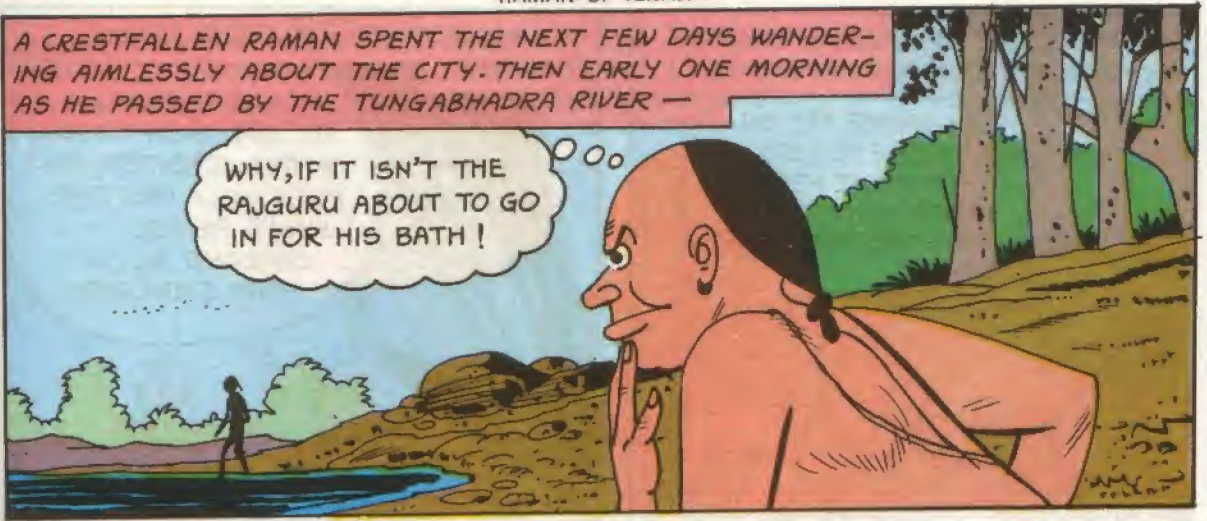


BEFORE RAMAN KNEW WHAT WAS HAPPENING, HE WAS OUT ON THE STREET.



A CRESTFALLEN RAMAN SPENT THE NEXT FEW DAYS WANDERING AIMLESSLY ABOUT THE CITY. THEN EARLY ONE MORNING AS HE PASSED BY THE TUNGABHADRA RIVER —

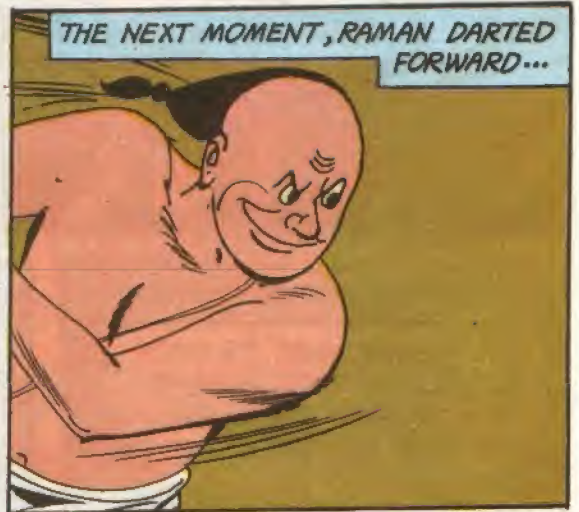
WHY, IF IT ISN'T THE RAJGURU ABOUT TO GO IN FOR HIS BATH!



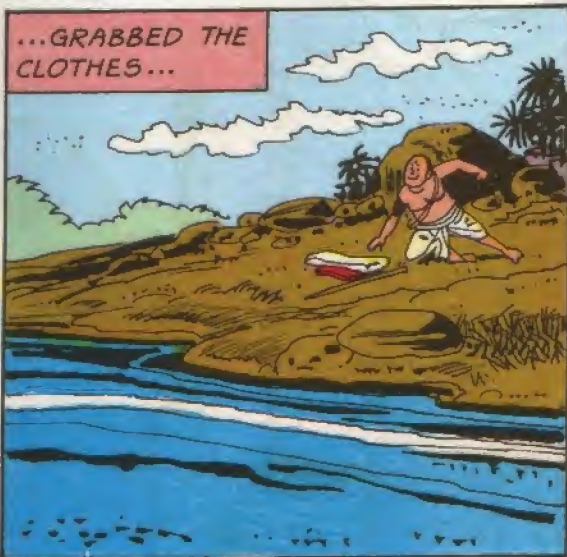
HE'S LEFT HIS CLOTHES ON THE BANK!



THE NEXT MOMENT, RAMAN DARTED FORWARD...

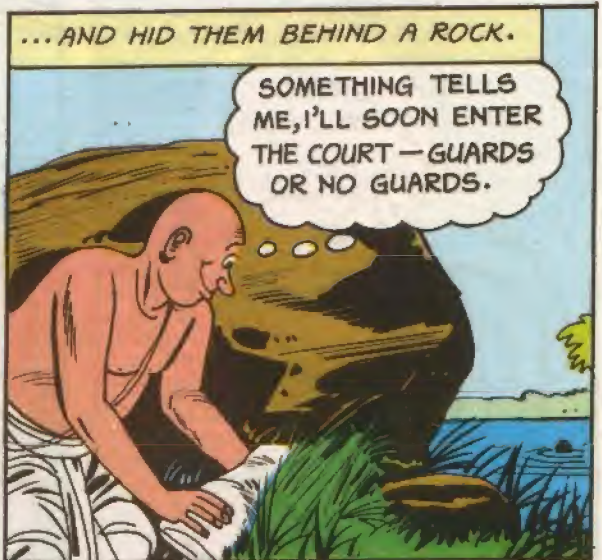


...GRABBED THE CLOTHES...



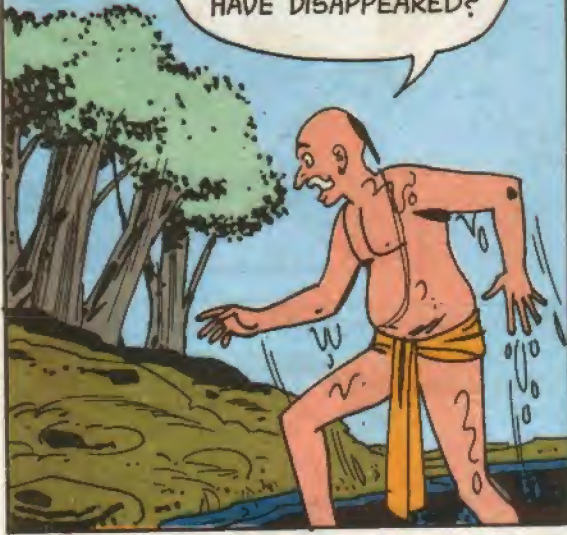
...AND HID THEM BEHIND A ROCK.

SOMETHING TELLS ME, I'LL SOON ENTER THE COURT — GUARDS OR NO GUARDS.



HIS BATH OVER, THE RAJGURU TURNED AND REACHED OUT FOR HIS CLOTHES.

WH-WHERE ARE MY CLOTHES? I'D LEFT THEM RIGHT HERE. WHERE COULD THEY HAVE DISAPPEARED?



RAMAN STEPPED OUT FROM BEHIND THE TREE.

I HAVE THEM. I'LL GIVE THEM TO YOU, ON ONE CONDITION. YOU MUST WALK PAST THE KING'S PALACE CARRYING ME ON YOUR SHOULDERS.

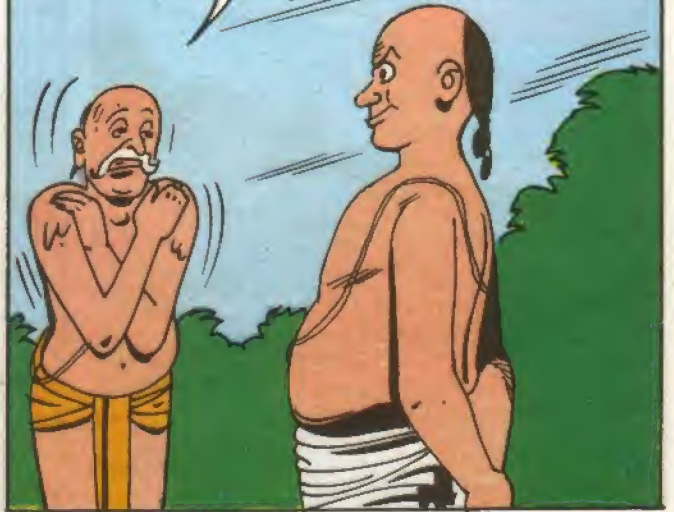


THE RAJGURU HAD TO AGREE.

THE FELLOW MUST BE MAD! BUT I'LL HAVE TO HUMOUR HIM OR CATCH MY DEATH IN THIS ICY WATER.

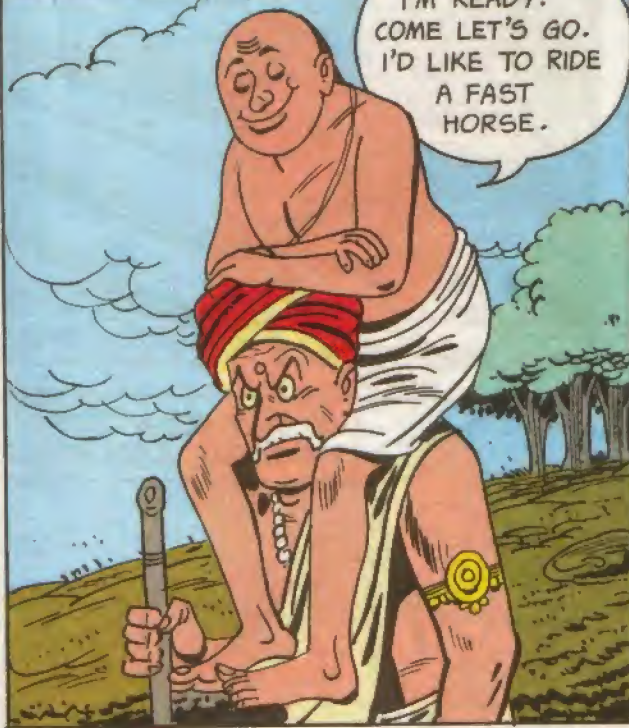


ALL RIGHT. I'LL CARRY YOU. NOW GIVE ME BACK MY CLOTHES.



AS SOON AS THE PRIEST WAS DRESSED, RAMAN HOISTED HIMSELF ONTO HIS SHOULDERS.

I'M READY.
COME LET'S GO.
I'D LIKE TO RIDE
A FAST
HORSE.

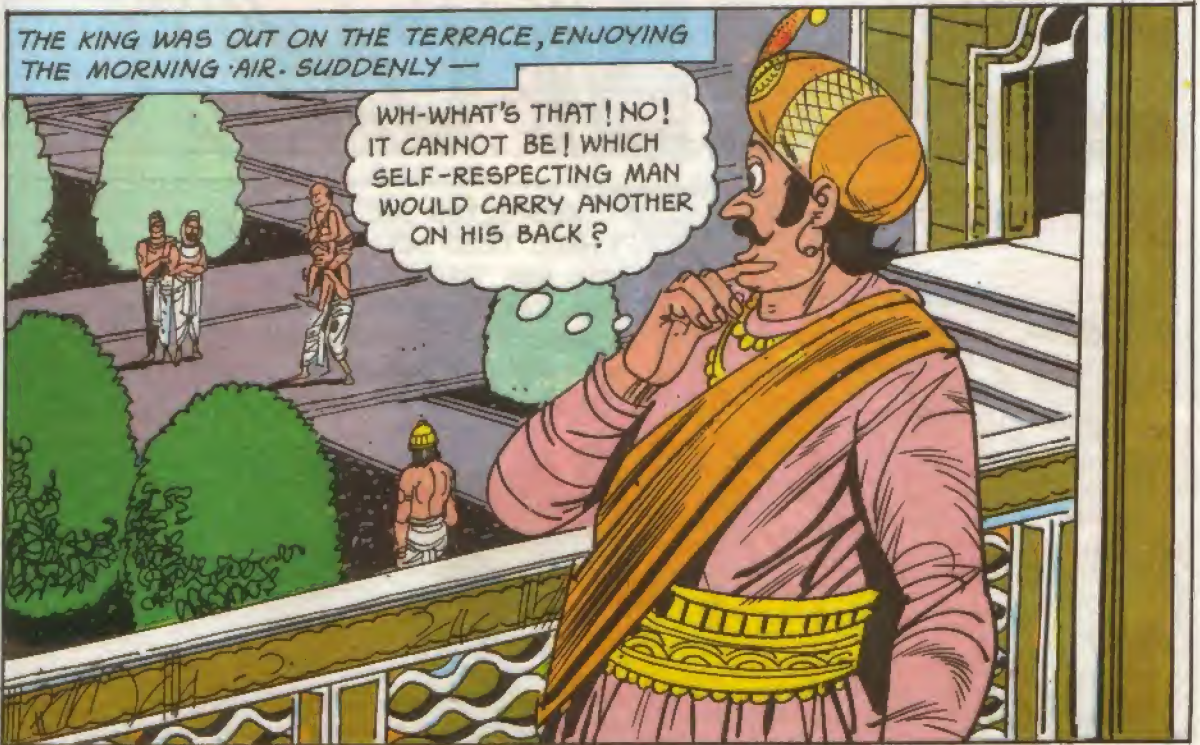


THE PRIEST BEGAN WALKING AND THEY SOON APPROACHED THE PALACE.



THE KING WAS OUT ON THE TERRACE, ENJOYING THE MORNING AIR. SUDDENLY —

WH-WHAT'S THAT ! NO!
IT CANNOT BE ! WHICH
SELF-RESPECTING MAN
WOULD CARRY ANOTHER
ON HIS BACK ?



CURIOUS, THE KING STARED AT THE FIGURES, WAITING FOR THEM TO COME NEARER.

IT'S MY GURU!
SURELY THERE'S
SOME MISCHIEF
AFOOT!



THE KING!
HE'S SEEN
US!



HE'S BOUND TO
SEND HIS GUARDS
OUT. I MUST BE
QUICK!

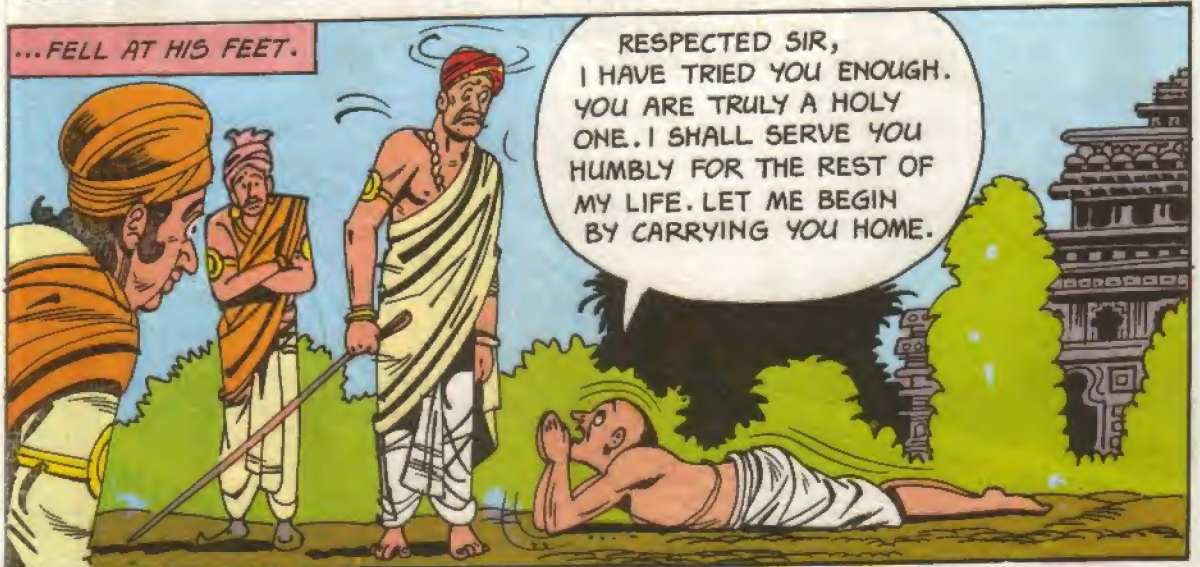


HE SLID DOWN THE
RAJGURU'S BACK AND...



...FELL AT HIS FEET.

RESPECTED SIR,
I HAVE TRIED YOU ENOUGH.
YOU ARE TRULY A HOLY
ONE. I SHALL SERVE YOU
HUMBLY FOR THE REST OF
MY LIFE. LET ME BEGIN
BY CARRYING YOU HOME.



BEFORE THE RAJGURU COULD PROTEST,
RAMAN HOISTED HIM ON HIS
SHOULDERS...



... AND BEGAN WALKING.



MEANWHILE, THE KING HAD
SUMMONED HIS GUARDS.

THERE IS A MAN
RIDING ON MY EXALTED
GURU'S SHOULDERS.
I SMELL MISCHIEF. DRAG
THE FELLOW DOWN,
GIVE HIM A SOUND
THRASHING AND
LEAD THE GURU
TO ME.



THE GUARDS HAD BEEN APPOINTED ONLY
THE PREVIOUS EVENING AND THIS WAS
THEIR FIRST ASSIGNMENT. THEY WERE
EAGER TO MAKE IT A THOROUGH
SUCCESS.

THERE
THEY ARE!



THEY RUSHED FORWARD...



...DRAGGED THE RAJGURU OFF RAMAN'S BACK...



...GAVE HIM A SOUND THRASHING...

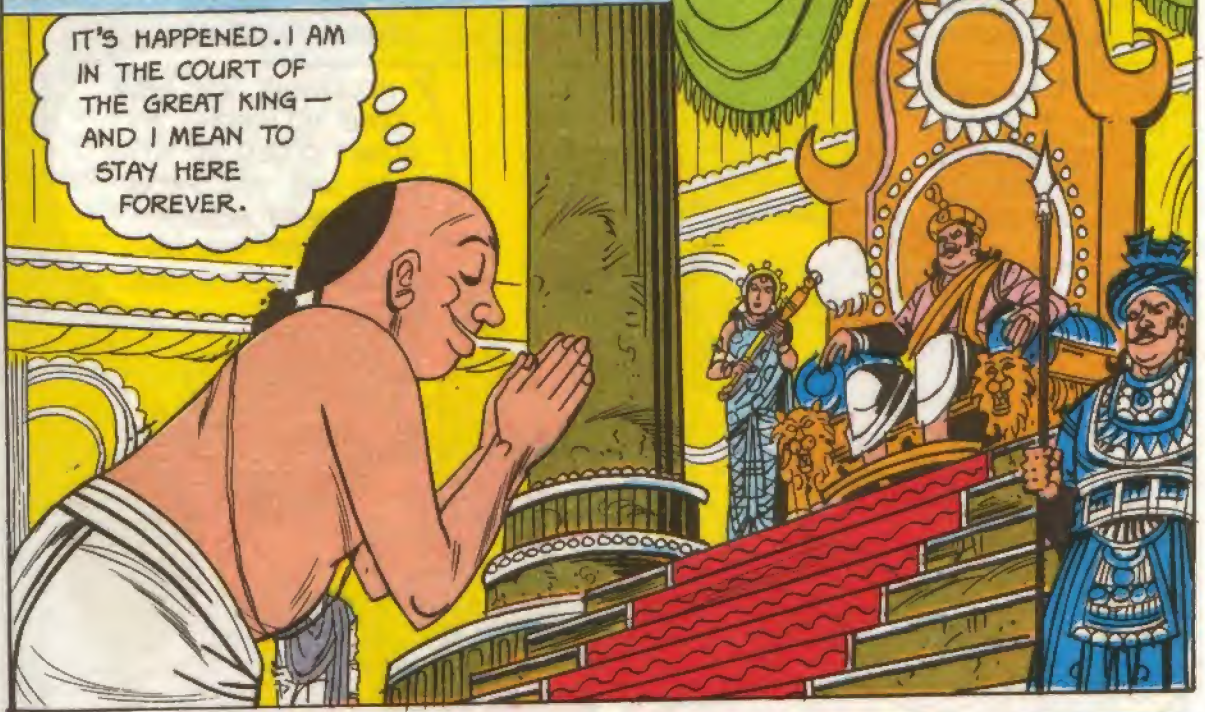


...AND ADDRESSED RAMAN IN THE MOST RESPECTFUL TERMS.

O HOLY ONE, THE SCOUNDREL HAS BEEN DEALT WITH. HIS MAJESTY HAS REQUESTED YOU TO PERMIT US TO ESCORT YOU TO HIM.



SOON RAMAN STOOD BEFORE THE KING —



THE KING WAS SURPRISED.



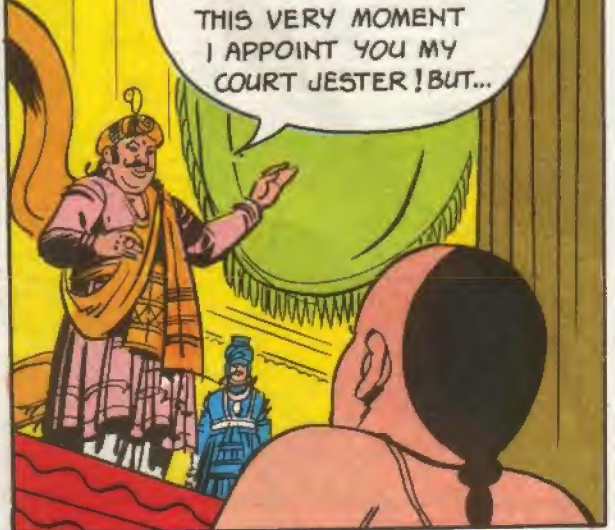
AND RAMAN TOLD THE KING ALL ABOUT HIS ENCOUNTER WITH THE GURU. THEN —

IF YOUR MAJESTY DEEMS IT FIT TO PUNISH ME, I'LL TAKE THE PUNISHMENT.



BUT THE KING TOOK AN IMMEDIATE LIKING TO THE BOLD, FRANK, FEARLESS RAMAN.

NO, RAMAN. YOU HAVE DONE NO WRONG. MY COURT COULD DO WITH MEN LIKE YOU. FROM THIS VERY MOMENT I APPOINT YOU MY COURT JESTER! BUT...



...IF AT ANY TIME YOU FORGET YOURSELF AND GO TOO FAR WITH YOUR WIT AND YOUR JOKES, YOU SHALL BE HANGED!



THE KING THEN DIPPED INTO HIS CUMMERBUND AND FISHED OUT A BAG OF GOLD COINS.

TAKE THIS. BUY YOURSELF A HOUSE IN VIJAYANAGARA AND SET UP A HOME.

I AM HONoured, YOUR MAJESTY.



RAMAN COULD HARDLY BELIEVE HIS LUCK.

MY AGED MOTHER AND MY GOOD WIFE WILL BE HAPPY WATCHING ME PROSPER UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF THE GREAT KING. A GREAT DAY INDEED!

THUS DID RAMAN OF TENALI ENTER THE COURT OF THE GREAT KING OF VIJAYANAGARA.

ANXIOUS TO PLEASE THE KING, RAMAN LEFT HOME EARLY EACH MORNING AND RETURNED LATE AT NIGHT. AS HE WAS RETURNING HOME ONE MOONLIT NIGHT—

I HAVE NOT YET FOUND TIME TO WATER MY FIELDS THIS WEEK. TOMORROW I MUST...

SUDDENLY HE STIFFENED. TWO DARK FIGURES, LURKING IN THE SHADOWS, HAD CAUGHT HIS ATTENTION.

THIEVES! THEY DON'T KNOW I'VE SEEN THEM. WELL! WELL! WELL!

HE WALKED STRAIGHT ON TO HIS HOUSE. AS HE ENTERED —

AH! IS THAT YOU?
YOUR DINNER IS
COLD. I'LL WARM
IT UP FOR YOU.



TO HER SURPRISE, RAMAN RAISED HIS VOICE AND ALMOST SHOUTED AT HER.

WE HAD A BUSY DAY AT COURT. THE CITY IS RIDDEN WITH THIEVES AND PEOPLE HAVE BEEN WARNED TO LOCK UP THEIR VALUABLES.

OH DEAR!
WHAT SHALL
WE DO?



I DON'T EVEN
LATCH THE
DOOR TILL
WE SLEEP.

PUT ALL OUR JEWELLERY,
SILVERWARE AND MONEY
INTO A TRUNK AND I'LL
THROW IT INTO THE
WELL. NO THIEF WILL
EVER FIND IT.

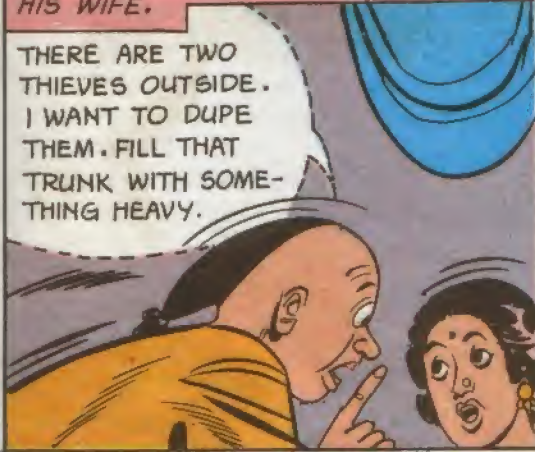


HA! HA!
THAT'S
WHAT YOU
THINK.



THEN RAMAN STEPPED CLOSER TO HIS WIFE.

THERE ARE TWO THIEVES OUTSIDE. I WANT TO DUPE THEM. FILL THAT TRUNK WITH SOMETHING HEAVY.



RAMAN'S WIFE WAS QUICK TO UNDERSTAND.

THIS GRINDING-STONE SHOULD BE IDEAL.



RAMAN DRAGGED THE TRUNK TO THE WELL...



...AND THREW IT IN, MAKING AS LOUD A SPLASH AS HE COULD.

NOW FOR A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP.



A LITTLE LATER, WHEN THE LAMPS WERE BLOWN OUT IN THE HOUSE —

THEY'VE GONE TO BED. IT'S SAFE TO COME OUT. LET'S GET TO WORK.



THEY WENT UP TO THE WELL AND PEEPED IN.



THERE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE MUCH WATER IN THERE.

GOOD! THAT SHOULD MAKE IT EASIER FOR US.

THE FOOLISH THIEVES BEGAN TO DRAIN THE WELL.



THEY WORKED THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT; BUT IN VAIN.



AH! MY BACK! CAN YOU SEE THE TRUNK?

NO. NOT YET. COME ON. WE MUST NOT GIVE UP NOW.

A LITTLE BEFORE DAWN, RAMAN SAW THAT HIS FIELDS HAD HAD ALL THE WATER THEY NEEDED.



IT'S TIME I RELIEVED THE POOR FOOLS.

HE WENT TO THE WELL.

THANK YOU, MY
GOOD MEN. YOU
HAVE DONE A
FINE JOB!

THE STARTLED THIEVES DROPPED
THE ROPES...

?!

... AND RAN FOR THEIR LIVES.

HA! HA! HA! WATCH
THEM RUN!

LATER AT COURT, WHEN RAMAN TOLD THE KING ABOUT HIS NOCTURNAL ADVENTURE—

HA! HA! HA! NOT ONLY DID YOU OUTWIT THE THIEVES BUT YOU MADE THEM WORK FOR YOU.

HA! HA! YOU ARE A ROGUE, IF I'VE MET ONE. HA! HA! HA!

AND HE GAVE TENALI A BAG OF GOLD FOR DIVERTING HIS CARE-LADEN MIND WITH THE AMUSING TALE.

AS THE DAYS WENT BY, THE KING FOUND RAMAN MORE AND MORE INDISPENSABLE AND ALL AT COURT BEGAN WONDERING HOW LONG RAMAN'S LUCK WOULD LAST.

WHY HE EVEN DARES TO MAKE THE KING THE BUTT OF HIS JOKES!

ONE DAY HE'LL GO TOO FAR, AND THEN IT WILL BE — "OFF WITH HIS HEAD."

A FEW MONTHS AFTER RAMAN HAD COME TO COURT, THE KING AND HIS QUEEN WERE ABOUT TO VIEW A SPECIAL PERFORMANCE BY A KRISHNALEELA* TROUPE.

I DO NOT WANT TO BE DISTURBED. LET NO ONE ENTER THE HALL.

A SPECIAL GUARD WAS POSTED AT THE MAIN GATE OF THE PALACE AND ANOTHER AT THE DOOR TO THE HALL.

MEANWHILE RAMAN CAME TO THE PALACE AND WAS ABOUT TO WALK IN AS USUAL, WHEN—

YOU MAY NOT ENTER.
THE KING'S ORDERS.
HE IS NOT TO BE
DISTURBED.



RAMAN'S CURIOSITY WAS AROUSED.

THERE IS SOMETHING
SPECIAL GOING ON AND
I HAVE NOT BEEN INVITED.
I MUST SEE WHAT IT IS!



HE TURNED TO THE GUARDS.

BUT I MUST SEE
THE KING. HE HAS
PROMISED ME A
REWARD AND
HAS ASKED ME
TO SEE HIM.

THE REWARD
MUST BE A BAG
OF GOLD AS
USUAL.



HE LOOKED GREEDILY AT RAMAN.

ALL RIGHT! WHAT
WILL YOU GIVE ME
IF I LET YOU
ENTER?

HALF OF WHAT
THE KING
GIVES ME.



THAT WAS EXACTLY WHAT THE GUARD WANTED TO HEAR.

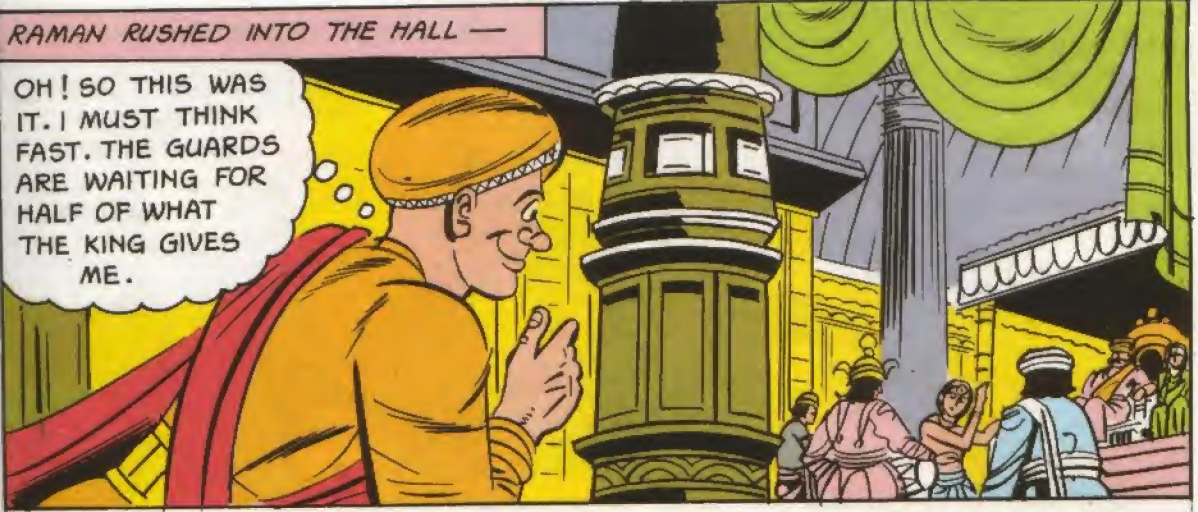


WHEN HE REACHED THE DOOR TO THE AUDIENCE HALL —



RAMAN RUSHED INTO THE HALL —

OH! SO THIS WAS IT. I MUST THINK FAST. THE GUARDS ARE WAITING FOR HALF OF WHAT THE KING GIVES ME.



HE RAN UP TO THE PLAYERS...

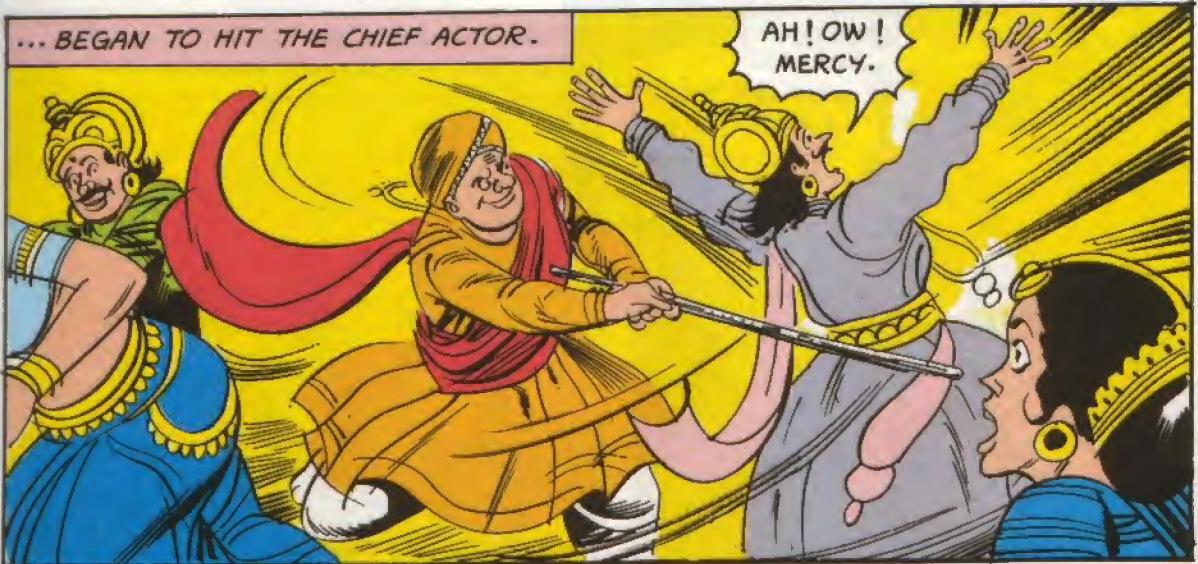


...AND PICKING UP A STICK...



...BEGAN TO HIT THE CHIEF ACTOR.

AH! OW! MERCY.



RAMAN! STOP IT!
HAVE YOU GONE
MAD? HOW
DARE YOU
DISTURB THE
PERFORMANCE.

HE TURNED TO HIS ATTENDANTS.

BRING THAT
FOOL BEFORE
ME.

WHEN RAMAN WAS DRAGGED BEFORE HIM —

YOU HAVE GONE A BIT TOO
FAR, RAMAN. YOU SHALL
RECEIVE A HUNDRED
LASHES FOR THIS
IMPUDENCE.

AS AN ATTENDANT RAISED THE WHIP —

PLEASE WAIT, YOUR
MAJESTY. I HAVE TWO
FRIENDS OUTSIDE WHO
WANT TO SHARE THE
LASHES.

THE KING WAS ASTONISHED.

WHO ARE THESE
FOOLS? HAVE
THEM BROUGHT
IN.

RAMAN WHISPERED SOMETHING
INTO THE ATTENDANT'S EAR.

THE ATTENDANT RETURNED WITH THE TWO GUARDS.

MY GUARDS? WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS, RAMAN? DO YOU WANT TO BE BEHEADED?



I AM HONOUR BOUND TO SHARE WITH THEM WHAT YOU WISH TO GIVE ME.

THE KING WAS AT ONCE ANGRY AND AMUSED. ANGRY WITH THE DISHONEST GUARDS AND AMUSED BY RAMAN'S WIT.

HOW DARE YOU ALLOW YOURSELVES TO BE BRIBED INTO DISOBEYING MY ORDERS!

AND HE TOLD THE KING HOW HE HAD GAINED ENTRY INTO THE PALACE AND THE AUDIENCE HALL.

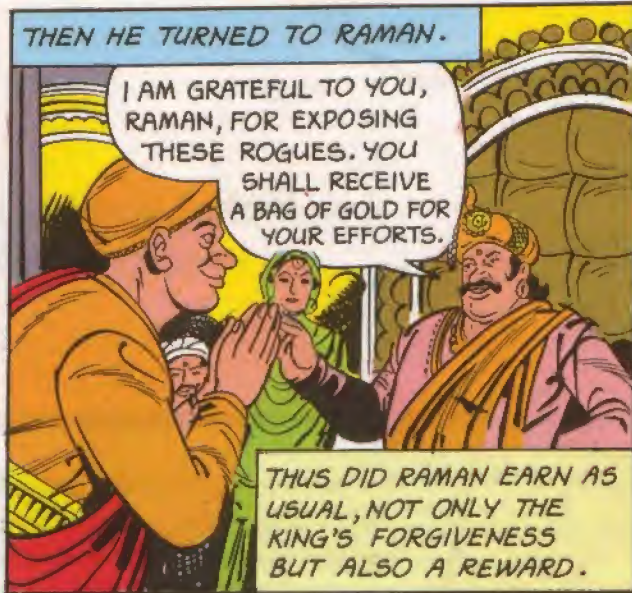
HE TURNED TO THE ATTENDANTS.

GIVE THEM FIFTY LASHES EACH AND DISMISS THEM.



THEN HE TURNED TO RAMAN.

I AM GRATEFUL TO YOU, RAMAN, FOR EXPOSING THESE ROGUES. YOU SHALL RECEIVE A BAG OF GOLD FOR YOUR EFFORTS.



THUS DID RAMAN EARN AS USUAL, NOT ONLY THE KING'S FORGIVENESS BUT ALSO A REWARD.